

WRITER FROM ARUBA LECTURES ON “ST. MAARTEN UNHEARD VOICES” IN AMSTERDAM

by AirBourne / December 25th, 2012

Aruban author **Quito Nicolaas** said at his recent lecture in Amsterdam that, “*St. Maarten’s administrative process in isolation – a world separated between the Windward and Leeward Islands – offered the people the internal space to build the economy of the island according to their own insights.*”

In his seminal paper, “**St. Maarten Literature; Unheard Voices**,” Nicolaas said, “*This inward process, in addition to an already highly developed [traditional] identity, resulted in the foundation on which the island’s own culture and literature could well thrive and flourish.*”

The lecture was organized by Simia Literario and delivered in Dutch as, “**De onbekende stemmen in de St. Maartense literatuur**” on December 8, 2012.

Nicolaas also said, “*St. Maarten is yet another example in economic history that once there are economic development and prosperity, there are cultural patterns that are going to develop,*” such as the writing of books.



Quito Nicolas, author. (Bookish Plaza)

“*The citizens begin to take an interest in their history, language, culture and other achievements and believe that these should be laid down in writing,*” said Nicolaas to the audience of the well-attended lecture.

According to Nicolaas, *“The House of Nehesi Publishers (HNP) has worked as a catalyst in the literary process and ensured that there is a literary infrastructure.”*

To Nicolaas, *“The St. Maarten literature is based on two pillars: on the one hand works of authors of its own soil and, on the other hand, publications of Caribbean authors.”* However, he does not make too clear of a distinction, or elaboration between the development of a national literature and book publishing in itself.

Nicolaas pointed out that, *“Besides poetry, works in the fields of history, politics, culture, folklore, religion, and music have also been published,”* by HNP.

“After three decades all genres are practically well represented: biography, autobiography, travelogue, essays, short stories, and poetry,” **said Nicolaas, furthermore he observed;-** *“in its fold HNP has currently forty-one writers, including a number of writers from the neighboring countries [and beyond], that have one or more publications on their name. Thus, we see works of Fabian Badejo (Nigeria/St. Martin), Shake Keane (St. Vincent), Chiqui Vicioso (Dominican Rep.), Marion Bethel (The Bahamas), Amiri Baraka (USA), Howard Fergus (Montserrat), **George Lamming** and **Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados)**, and Nidaa Khoury (Israel).”*



An essayist, short story writer, and poet himself, Nicolaas said that St. Martin writers appear to be more adept at poetry than novels and short stories.

However, this *“doesn’t differ from Aruba and Curacao and can be more typified as a development stage”* of a literature, said Nicolaas. **Wycliff Smith** had made this point in the early 1980s in his seminal literary survey of the Dutch Windward Islands colonies. Nicolaas concluded that, *“the oral history of St. Maarten can play a specific role in the literature. Educated and raised with the stories of the past that their grandparents told, the new generation of writers must use this as material to write on.”*



Following the Nicolaas lecture, books by St. Martin writers and other Caribbean authors published in St. Martin – such as *National Symbols of St. Martin* and *Sovereignty of the Imagination* – were made available by Bookish Plaza bookstore for the guests to purchase.

“The tendency to dig in the past is now enormous and to go on a journey of discovery to do something with it is even bigger. Novels or short stories that we will be reading in different times could give us a look into the emotions, thinking, and behaviors of the people of St. Maarten,” said Nicolaas, who is also a legal consultant in the Netherlands.

“The approach of Mr. Nicolaas adds to a slowly but steadily growing number of literary critics and academics from abroad who are taking a hard stare at the increasing cultural complexity and the literary activities and output in St. Martin,” said HNP president Jacqueline Sample on Thursday.



Audience members in Amsterdam applaud at lecture, “St. Maarten Literature; Unheard Voices.” (Bookish Plaza)

Nicolaas dedicated his lecture to the Aruban kaiso pioneer **David “Young QuickSilver” Hodge**, who passed away on December 4, 2012.

Source: <http://www.bajanreporter.com/2012/12/writer-from-aruba-lectures-on-st-maarten-unheard-voices-in-amsterdam/>

